



## What Does Usurpation Mean?

### Overview:

Abraham Lincoln considered the Declaration of Independence the defining document of American History. To him and others this document not only declares America's independence from Great Britain, but it also establishes a common language, sentiment and identity for "these United States." However ingenious this document is, the authors relied upon the Enlightenment writers' ideologies to create something that not only transcends time, but also bind us as Americans today.

That is why the following lessons are designed to not only have students explore the true meaning of the Declaration of Independence, but to also expose students to the Enlightenment sentiments and philosophical principles that were used to create an American Identity.

By incorporating Literacy Skills, this lesson is not only aligned with the National History Standards; it can be used to support Literacy Standards set by No Child Left Behind.

### Materials/Resources for the Lesson :

1. Enlightenment Primary Documents:
  - a. John Locke: *State of Nature*
  - b. England's *Magna Carta*
  - c. Thomas Paine: *Common Sense*
  - d. Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *The Social Compact*
  - e. David Hume: *On The First Principles of Government*
2. Primary Source Worksheet
  - a. Provides scaffolding needed to work with excerpts of the primary source
3. Declaration of Independence Definition Worksheet
4. What Does Usurpation Mean? Worksheet

**National United States History Standards:**

STANDARD 2: *Historical Comprehension*

STANDARD 3: *Historical Analysis and Interpretation*

STANDARD 4: *Historical Research Capabilities*

STANDARD 5: *Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making*

**National Civic Standards**

STANDARD 1: *What are Civic Life, Politics, and Government?*

STANDARD 2: *What are the Foundations of the American Political System?*

**Lesson Strategies:**

Length: 3-5 (45 minute) class periods

1. Have students read the Declaration of Independence. When reading the document, have students note or underline words they do not understand. Once they have created a list of approximately 15 vocabulary terms they are unfamiliar with, have them define the terms using either a textbook or dictionary.

***Hints:***

\*Use Declaration of Independence Definition Worksheet

\*Depending on level of class, vocabulary terms can be given as homework if more time is needed in class to go through the text.

\*Use vocabulary sheet for lower level class or inclusion class.

\*Text can be read aloud in class or with partners.

2. After students have read and defined terms discuss the Main Ideas of the Declaration.
  - a. What is the purpose of the Declaration of Independence as stated in the Preamble?
  - b. What are the five main parts of the Declaration of Independence?
  - c. What are three rights that all people have?
  - d. Why did the colonies feel that they had to declare their independence?
  - e. How does this document help create and often define an American Identity?

3. Once the background information is completed, then divide students into pairs. Give each pair a selected segment of an Enlightenment Writer. Please see Related Resources for list of writers.

***Hint:***

\*excerpts can vary on length depending on level of student or class.

\*Choose more challenging excerpts or full text for upper level students.

4. After Primary Document is assigned have each pair read and take notes. Students should use the *Primary Source Literacy Sheet* to help guide them through the difficult material.

**Purpose:** This activity is to have students comprehend the political philosophies at the time of the Declaration of Independence and how the Enlightenment influenced the political writings of Revolutionary America.

***Hint:***

\*Before Reading Strategy: Setting Purpose-Why am I going to read this?

\*During Reading Strategy: What should I do/think about while I am reading this? Aid students in completing the *Primary Source Literacy Sheet*; encourage them to use post-its to “tag” important information. Reference: *Tools for Teaching Content Literacy*.

\*After Reading Strategy: What should I remember as I walk away from this?- Last question utilizes this strategy.

5. Students then have to present their information following the activity sheet, leading to a discussion that should focus upon human nature, liberty, the state of nature and the reasoning behind government.
6. The final piece of the activity is to have students write their own Declaration of Independence in “kid friendly” language, using the What Does Usurpation Mean? Guidelines.